

## Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

### Red spruce restoration

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

A recent afternoon found staff from the Fish and Wildlife Service and Southern Highlands Reserve bushwhacking through Pisgah National Forest collecting red spruce cones - a first step in a multi-year process to restore red spruce to areas where it was found before the extensive logging and burning at the turn of the 20th century.

The Southern Appalachians are home to the highest peaks in the eastern United State, where red spruce is a key forest tree. Unfortunately, the amount of red spruce found today is a fraction of what stood 150 years ago. These forests were decimated by logging, which was followed by intensive fires that burned the thick layer of organic material the spruce needed to re-establish themselves, allowing a northern hardwood forest, with trees like maple and birch, to expand into new areas.

The collected cones will be divided among partners who will extract the seeds and grow new trees to be planted on public lands where red spruce once grew. In addition to helping conserve red spruce trees themselves, this effort will benefit wildlife, as high-elevation conifer trees are important sources of food and shelter for a variety of animals, including the endangered Carolina northern flying squirrel.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.